

Sermons

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S E R M O N

P R E A C H ' D

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Staplehurst and Patrixbourne.

By JOHN BOWTELL, D.D.

-----*God resisteth the proud, but
giveth grace unto the humble.*

James iv. 6.

*Though the Lord be high, yet hath
he respect unto the lowly : but
the proud he knoweth afar off.*
Pfal. cxxxviii. 6.



CANTERBURY: Printed by J. Abree.

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I P E T. V. 5.

Be cloath'd with Humility--

MY Design at present from these Words is to recommend the great and necessary Duty of *Humility*: The most effectual Way to do this, I suppose, will be to set before you some of those Advantages we may hope for by the Practice of it.

By this Means I wou'd promise myself your serious Attention, in Hopes of meeting with Arguments sufficient to convince us, that it is the best Foundation we can lay for a Vertuous and a Religious Life; and therefore it effectually answers the great End of our coming hither; where we meet to admire the wonderful Works, the Power and Goodness of God; to own our whole Dependance upon him, and to pray for such Blessings as his Wisdom shall judge to be best and most fitting for us: And Humility teaches us to do all this in such a manner as becomes our present Circumstances, and is the likeliest to prevail with Him, who,

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by his Holy Apostle, has told us, that He *giveth Grace to the Humble.*

He encourages and assists every one of us, that are so dispos'd; and is pleas'd to see us perform those Duties especially that are more immediately related to Humility: This being the very Practice, in which his only beloved Son, in whom he is well pleas'd, calls upon us to imitate him.

Learn of me, says our Blessed Saviour, *for I am meek and lowly in Heart.* Now that we may show a ready Obedience to our Saviour's Command, and not fall into any Mistake about the Nature of this Duty, let us consider,

1. What is meant by Humility.
2. And then of what Advantage it must needs be to such, as can prevail with themselves to practice it.
3. Lastly, how and in what manner we may bring ourselves to be intitled to those Blessings, which God has been pleas'd to promise as a Reward to this Vertue.

First,

First, Let us consider what we are to understand by Humility.

Humility is a Vertue, or Grace, that shews a Man what he is; it dispels all those Mists, that Pride and Self-love are apt to cast before our Eyes, in order to give us a clear and distinct Knowledge of ourselves; by laying aside all those Prejudices that usually attend us when we look into ourselves; disposing the Mind to pass a right Judgment, and to determine impartially concerning a Man's present State and Condition with regard to his Duty.

It presses Men, and calls upon them to weigh every Circumstance relating to it; it gives them a Willingness, and puts them forward in a faithful Discharge of it; and never suffers them to excuse or palliate those Irregularities they find themselves guilty of, but rather to aggravate and condemn all unwarrantable Proceedings they can recollect, or any way discover in their past Life and Conversation.

For, with regard to their Duty, they are never unresolv'd; they shew no wavering in that Case, but are dispos'd to press forward at

all Hazards, when they are sure that calls them, and will never suffer themselves to be perverted, or listen to any evil Suggestions that go about to seduce them from it.

‘ Their great Care is always to be conducted by the best Rules, that Prudence and Innocence can appoint them; making use of that Shield of Faith which worketh by Love, and is able to quench the fiery Darts of the Devil, and helps them to elude all Attempts the Enemy can possibly make upon their Integrity; they stand firm and resolute to their Duty, and are inflexible to every Thing that is evil.

No Threats or Promises of Men can lay any Restraint upon their Actions more than what their Duty has oblig’d them to observe. They believe God, by a particular Providence, orders the Affairs of this World; and that He has a special Regard to them that put their Trust in Him.

And they know too that their Love and Fear of Him, their Thankfulness for his Blessings, and Obedience to his holy Laws, with Meekness and Resignation to his Divine Will, shall certainly recommend them to his gracious Protection;

rection; so that they will not be afraid of any evil Tidings; for their Heart standeth fast, and believeth in the Lord.

Thus well grounded, and full of Immortality is that Man's Hope, which is built upon Humility; and who by that Means adheres firmly to his holy Profession, and is truly, what *St. Paul* exhorted the *Corinthians* to be, steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the Work of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; to whom alone he frequently addresses himself for his Grace and Protection, that he would direct and guide him, being well acquainted with his own Frailty, and his manifold Imperfections; and throughly sensible how liable he is to Temptations, yet unable to resist any without the Grace of God to support him; and is so far from boasting of any good Deeds as his own, that he knows when he has done all he can, he is at the best but an unprofitable Servant, having done nothing but what it was his Duty to do:

Nor has he then Hopes that what he has done will be accepted, but thro' the Merits of Jesus Christ, in whom alone God is well pleased; and by whom alone we have Access to
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the Throne of Grace, there being no other Name under Heaven whereby we must be saved. *Acts* iv. 12.

2. After a short View of the Faith and Practice of one that is *cloath'd with Humility*, let it be further consider'd, what an Advantage such a Man gains over himself, fix'd and resolute as he is, to fear God and keep his Commandments.

For it teaches him to moderate all his Desires; to be content in whatever State he finds himself; never to be cast down with Afflictions; which he knows are sent him by the Hand of God; to whose wise Disposal of all his Concerns he intirely submits, and absolutely resigns himself.

On the other Hand, and in a much more dangerous Case, he can be steady and behave with as even a Temper under the greatest Affluence of this World's Goods, and other Instances of God's gracious Favour and Bounty towards him, rightly determining to make that Use of them that a Christian ought to do.

When he considers what Blessings he has receiv'd from Heaven; by what extraordinary Talents

Talents God has been pleas'd to distinguish him from others; as if his worldly Affairs prosper; if his Riches increase, or if Providence has furnish'd his Mind with some uncommon Endowments, or given him a Capacity superior to that of many others; or, lastly, by what is of the highest Consequence, and the most desirable State in this World, I mean a due Sense of Religion, and an undissembled Zeal for the Glory of God, testify'd by a Life perfectly conformable to the Divine Will; with an Abhorrence and Detestation of that unchristian Behaviour, all those base and unworthy Practices in which the World generally and shamefully indulge themselves; when he considers

These mighty Advantages thus plentifully bestow'd upon him are so many good Gifts from Above; so many Talents entrusted with him, and to be improv'd, and of all which he knows e're long there must be an Account given, his first Care is conscientiously to make that Use of them, which the gracious Donor intended he shou'd :

So that if his Talent lies in an extensive Knowledge, deep and solid Learning, he out
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of this Treasure freely communicates what may be of Service to others; to teach and instruct them how to understand and practise those Duties that are absolutely requisite to a holy Life.

If Providence has brought him in, and plentifully furnish'd him with Wealth, and Riches, and the good Things of this Life; his Care is to let the Poor and Needy be sensible of what God has done for him, by a chearful and seasonable Charity, in bestowing such Blessings upon them, as he enjoys for no other End, after himself and his Dependants are supply'd, but to distribute to such as are in Necessity.

If it be Power and Authority that God has invested him with, he honestly and resolutely sets about the Exercise of it, by a strict Regard to Justice; and that Golden Rule, our Blessed Lord has recommended to us, of *doing to others as we would have them do by us*; and by suppressing Vice and Wickedness; by encouraging Vertue and Religion; by discountenancing the Sinner, and supporting the Righteous; frequently petitioning Almighty God for his assisting Grace, and a Spirit that may actuate the whole Man, in a zealous Improvement of all such Talents as have been dealt out to him.

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But notwithstanding all these temporal Blessings and great Advantages granted him, he still continues to be that humble, meek, and lowly minded Man, who thinks not highly of himself, but soberly, according to the Grace that is given him.

His Knowledge and Learning may raise him above others ; but he does not for that Reason look down upon them with Contempt, but considers who gave him such Advantage, and is thankful to God, and the more ready to assist and instruct them that want it.

His Wealth, Riches, and Plenty that flow in upon him, fill him indeed with Care, not how to increase them still, but how to make the best Use of them ; and part with them as freely as he receiv'd them, when they serve to relieve and comfort those that are afflicted with Poverty and Want ; for he never sets his Heart upon them but to do Good, as a wise Steward, whom his Lord when he comes shall find so doing, discharging his Duty in a proper and faithful Distribution of what he has been entrusted with.

His Power and Authority are made use of not to vex and oppress, but to do that which

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is Right; doing Justice to all; inflicting due Punishment on him that does his Neighbour Wrong; and by supporting and protecting those that are Innocent.

In all Parts of his Life we are sure to meet this humble Man in the same even Temper; whether the World frowns or smiles upon him he is the same steady Man, let his Condition and Circumstances be adverse or prosperous, his Behaviour like his Profession is all of a Piece, ever consistent with itself.

His Mind neither sinks under Misfortunes, nor is puff'd up in Prosperity, but adheres strictly to the Rule *Solomon* has left us, where he says, *in the Day of Prosperity be joyful, but in the Day of Adversity consider*; Eccles. vii. 14.

Always suiting himself to his present Circumstances, is neither too much lifted up in Prosperity, nor cast down in Adversity; he rejoiceth, and is thankful to God for one; and he submits and meekly resigns himself, without the least Murmuring or Discontent under the other.

If we wou'd consider how many Things conspire to make that Man happy, whose Humility recommends him to the Favour of God, we might more than fill up a Discourse by a bare Recital of them, without enlarging on their Nature and Tendency that way ; one of that Temper and Disposition being never unprepar'd to make some good Use of every Thing that shall happen, and so far as it concerns himself, has learnt to turn it to his own Advantage.

There are a great many Afflictions and Troubles which often fall heavy upon a Man of an humble Spirit ; and here 'tis, his Humility, join'd with that Meekness and Patience, which are the constant Attendants of such a Disposition, as makes up and compleats the Character of him that is lowly in his own Eyes :

By these Vertues and Graces, I say, it is that such a Christian is supported, and carried thro' all the Dangers and Temptations that threaten him ; he is sensible of their Attempts against him, and that he is no ways able of himself to repel their Force, or countermine their evil and malicious Contrivances ; but his Reliance is on the Power, and Goodness, and

Mercy of the Almighty ; that High and Lofty One, that inhabiteth Eternity, whose Name is Holy. *I dwell in the high and lofty Place,* says God, by his holy Prophet *Isaiab* ; *with him also that is of a contrite and humble Spirit, to revive the Spirit of the humble, and to revive the Heart of the contrite ones.* lvii. 15.

Now, what greater Advantage can we propose to ourselves ; or what greater Encouragement to quicken us in the Practice of this Vertue, than to be assur'd, that God will dwell in our Hearts ; that he will guide and direct us ; that he will save and defend us ?

And that by Humility and the Fear of the Lord are Riches, and Honour, and Life ; that is a modest and humble Opinion that a Man has of himself ; and a due Regard for Religion is the best Means, the surest Way to gain him an Esteem amongst Men ; and what is infinitely better, it disposes him for the Favour of God ; for the Blessings of Providence in all those Instances, more especially that will serve to fill his Mind with Peace and Comfort, and sweeten those Trials and Afflictions that may be judg'd necessary to keep him steady to his Duty ; and to conduct him safe thro' such

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Conflicts with his own Passions, as may strive to divert him from it.

The Man after God's own Heart tells us, *before he was troubled he went wrong ; but now,* says he, *have I kept thy Word ;* teaching us thereby the right Use we are to make of those Troubles that God sees it best sometimes to lay upon his Servants, who by such means are soon brought to consider, to return to their Duty ; to submit and humble themselves ; to continue faithful and obedient ; contented and thankful for all such Instances of his tender and Fatherly Care over them :

Knowing that such light Afflictions, which is but for a Moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding Weight of Glory ; and that whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, even as a Father the Son, in whom he delighteth.

Now, a mean Opinion of ourselves, which we must needs have, when we consider what we are, and how many Sins we have to answer for, will teach us to receive those gracious and merciful Visitations, such Afflictions as we know are sent from Heaven, with Meekness, and Humility, Thankfulness, and a patient Sub-

Submission to that Divine Wisdom, which knows what we most want, and what is best for us; and will see that every thing shall work together for our Good, if we love God and keep his Commandments :

As that Humility, which our Blessed Lord has recommended to us, is the most dispos'd to do from a Sense of the mighty Obligations he has laid upon us; being quicken'd by those Fatherly Corrections, by which God of his infinite Mercy designs to bring us safe from, amidst the Temptations of this World, to the Injoyment of that happy State, which he has reserv'd for us in the next.

3. And therefore let us now consider, in the next Place, by what Means we may bring ourselves to be truly humble; that our Humility may be genuine, and without that mistaken Opinion of our own Worth, which Self-love and Pride wou'd perswade us to have; for where either of them are admitted, a Man can make no right Judgment of himself:

So that if we are in good Earnest, and do sincerely purpose to bring ourselves into the Number of those, that wou'd be possess'd of that

that Meekness and Humility, which is in the Sight of God of great Price, we shou'd enter upon a strict Examination of our own Ways, and look into every Thing that concerns us as rational Creatures, and profess'd Christians; and compare our Life with those holy Precepts, with that Divine Law, by which we ought to live here, and are to be judg'd hereafter, to be acquitted or condemn'd, according to what we have done in the Flesh, whether it be good or bad.

For looking back with a careful and impartial Eye, with due Consideration, and proper Reflections upon the Nature and Circumstances of our past Actions, will directly lead us to this Duty, and help to fix in us a regular Course of Life; for when we have examin'd impartially how Matters have gone with us hitherto, with regard to that Account we are to give of ourselves hereafter; when we have review'd our past Conduct, and clearly discover'd how short our Practice has come of what our holy Profession requires of us:

So many Indiscretions in our Behaviour; such Blemishes in our Character as Christians, and so many provoking Sins against God must
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needs appear, as will be enough to bring down all those towering Thoughts we are too apt to conceive of our own Worth and Merits, and teach us not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think.

Nothing gives a greater Check to Pride and Self-love; nothing teaches us Humility so effectually as to be perfectly acquainted with our own Circumstances, our own Temper I mean, and Disposition; to consider how we have liv'd; what has chiefly taken up our Time; how much of it has been spent in the Pursuit of such Things as we shou'd blush to own; so trifling, vain, and foolish do they now appear!

What can ever create in us so mean an Opinion of our selves, as to see how weak, how rash, how inconsiderate, and how sinful we have been?

How we have provok'd Almighty God, by an ungrateful Return for all the Mercies and Blessings which he from Time to Time has graciously bestow'd upon us?

How uneasy must such Reflections make us; and how restless, till, by a sincere Repentance,

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we have humbled ourselves before God, and recover'd to ourselves his Favour ; and, by the Assistance of his Holy Spirit, brought ourselves to a perfect Submission and Resignation to his Divine Will : In order,

To be govern'd and directed by Him ; to believe and obey whenever He speaks and commands ; till our Thoughts, our Inclinations, and all our Faculties come readily into a constant Course of doing that which is good and acceptable to Almighty God ; and may hope to be reconcil'd to the Father of Mercies, and God of all Comfort, thro' the Merits, and for the Sake of our Blessed Saviour, who lov'd us, and gave himself for us.

Thus have I endeavour'd to show you, that Humility is a Grace or Vertue which teaches us to know ourselves, and discovers to us the true Nature of our Actions ; and, so far as any of them are irregular, views them with those just Aggravations they deserve ; and representing the worst of them in their proper Colours, in order to preserve us from the evil Effects of Pride and Self-love :

So that we may not be deceiv'd, but appear to ourselves what we truly are, poor sinful Creatures, not able to do any thing that is good, or can be acceptable to God, but by the Assistance of his Holy Spirit, which we are therefore at all Times zealously and fervently to pray for.

The Advantages of it are seen in that even Temper and steady Behaviour, which the meek and humble Man shows under all the Occurrences of Life, and in all States and Conditions whatsoever; no ways disturb'd with the apprehension of any Misfortune that may befall him; because let it be what it will, it can last but a few Days:

He looks upon himself as unworthy of those Things, that are sent him from Heaven; but is thankful for them, and endeavours sincerely to make the best Use of them, to the Honour of God, and the Benefit and Advantage of his Fellow-Christians.

This Lowliness of Mind is to be obtain'd by a serious and strict Examination of ourselves, by discovering how weak and how sinful we have been; and that this may be sure to have

a good Effect, and make a due Impression upon us, and put us upon a holy Resolution to reform our Ways, and mortify all our inordinate Affections, we must send up to Almighty God our earnest Petitions that he wou'd direct and guide us to will and to do according to his good Pleasure :

For Christ tells us *we can do nothing without him* ; no good Thing without the Assistance of his Blessed Spirit : But if we thro' the Spirit do mortify the Deeds of the Body, we shall live ; our whole Conversation will then be according to the Gospel of Christ, we shall enjoy the Promise of this Life, and that which is to come ; *for he that humbleth himself shall be exalted ; for the Lord is nigh them that are of a contrite Heart, and will save such as be of an humble Spirit.*

This is the Humility then that we may hope God will approve ; these are the Advantages we shall reap by it ; and here we have seen what Means we are to make use of in order to possess ourselves of it.

And now let me add one Caution for them that wou'd heartily set about this Duty ; and

advise them never to pry into the Affairs of others, nor at any time to censure their Actions, nor compare ourselves with them in order to make a partial Judgment of our own Conduct, or to think how much better it is than that of other Men.

'Tis a strong Argument against a Man's Humility, as well as his Discretion to boast with the *Pharisee*; and to conclude, as he does, that because he is not as other Men are, therefore he has fewer Sins to answer for:

Because he has not been guilty of some notorious and gross Enormities as others have; such as are vile, and lewd, and profligate Sinners; such as glory in their Shame:

But is he not guilty of some others not less heinous in the Eye of our heavenly Father, which, we are to consider, pierces into all the most secret Retirements of the Heart? Does he not harbour there some of those cursed Sins, that will effectually throw us out of his Favour; and certainly bring down upon us that Vengeance from Heaven, which is the unavoidable Consequence of those Sins, that he has threatened shall not go unpunish'd; such as are an

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Abomination to the Lord, as a proud Look, lying Lips, Envy, Malice, Covetousness, Hatred, Strife, and Contention :

If any of us therefore have been envious, censorious, covetous, deceitful, or done foolishly, by lifting up ourselves in a proud and haughty Manner against those, who for ought we know may have a much better Title to the Character of good Men, and to the Favour and Blessing of Almighty God :

If we look into our own Breast, and find ourselves chargeable with any of these Sins, let us, in the first Place, before we presume to censure others, humble ourselves before God ; let us express our Sorrow for such Provocations, by a sincere Repentance ; putting off that restless evil Spirit of Envy, Malice, and Censoriousness :

And putting on Bowels of Mercies, Kindness, Humbleness of Mind, Meekness, Long-Suffering ; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, even as Christ has forgiven us ; and left us an Example that we may do as he has done ; and that when He, who is our Life shall appear, we also may appear

appear with Him in Glory; To whom with
the Father, and Ever Blessed Spirit, Three
Persons, and One God, be ascrib'd all Honour
and Glory for ever. Amen.

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